How do potential new visitors find out about refuges? The most popular way to plan leisure trips, used by about 68 million Americans in 2011, is the Internet, according to the U.S. Travel Association. And social media are an important parts of users' Internet experience. The Pew Research Center reports that two-thirds of all adults who go online use social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Of those, 49 percent said they use social media to connect with others who share common interests or hobbies.

With these dynamic communication tools, we can create awareness about refuge issues, build support and get immediate feedback. This form of communication can help the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reach nontraditional audiences – such as the 13- to 24-year-olds who made up about one-third of Facebook users, or the Hispanic and African-American audiences who accounted for a combined 36.2 percent of Twitter users, as Advertising Age reported in May 2011.

By virtually "meeting" potential new visitors on Facebook, Twitter or customized apps, the Service encourages and enhances their visits. By staying in touch via social media, we help foster a lasting bond. Using social media, the Service can help build a constituency for refuges that are closed or in remote locations, teach the public about wildlife, habitat and scenery they may value and support even if they never see it in person. We use social media as an interpretive tool, awakening a sense of wonder, a desire to spend time outdoors and a willingness to support conservation.

By engaging directly with the social media community in highly charged situations, such as natural disasters or management controversies, the Service can help keep the public and refuge resources safe, avoid misunderstandings and make it clear to people that their concerns are heard. When citizens can discuss their concerns with the Service directly and immediately, they feel empowered – and that can go a long way toward preventing or defusing crises.

What is the difference between "social media" and "new media"?
"New media" is an umbrella term for websites and apps that provide information or entertainment on demand — everything from online news sites and content streaming to blogs and social media. New media are sometimes, but not always, tools for

two-way communication. "Social media" such as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr are interactive sites that encourage two-way communications.

Which social media sites can I use?
Most social media sites require users to accept lengthy "terms of service" agreements, which may conflict with government policies or legal obligations. To resolve these issues, the Department of the Interior negotiates agreements with social media companies; these must be in place before the Service can use a social media site for official business. See "Links and Online Resources" at the end of this guide for Service policies and examples of Service social media sites in action.

The following sites are currently approved for official use:

Facebook: Users create profiles, then build connections by becoming "friends" with people or "liking" pages. Refuges that create Facebook pages can share status updates, links, photos, videos and events that appear on their page and the Facebook news feeds of people who like their page.

Twitter: Users send out ("tweet") messages of 140 characters or less. Followers subscribe to a Twitter stream to get all the tweets posted by

that person. Hash tags are Twitter's version of keywords. They use the # sign followed by a word or a short run-together phrase, with no spaces, such as #wildlife or #LondonOlympics. Hash tags help users follow trending topics.

Flickr is a public photo-sharing site. Users can see photos that others have posted and download copies for their own use. There is one official Service Flickr account/photo stream for each region, within which separate collections can be set up. If you want to add photos to Flickr, contact External Affairs in your region.

YouTube is a public video-sharing site. There is one official Service YouTube account/channel, managed by External Affairs at Headquarters. Videos must be captioned and include the Service intro ("bumper"). If you want to post a video to this channel, contact External Affairs in your region.

Blogs are web sites where a person or group posts opinions and information – a sort of digital journal or column. Each entry is a "post." Effective blogging calls for frequent, regular posts, and most blogs take time to build a following. The Service has a national blog called "Open Spaces." Any Service office can add a blog to its web site. Contact your regional Web Council representative for blog approval and set-up help.

Social Media Options:	Frequency:	Content Requirements:	Potential for Interaction:	Accessibility:
Facebook	at least 2-3 posts per week	posts of 2-3 sentences or less (usually with pictures)	High	account needed to comment or like pages, and to view some pages
Twitter	high (daily or multiple times per week)	very short (140 characters max)tweets	High	users typically need Twitter account to participate
Flickr	can be low, medium or high	number of pictures can vary; need to be good quality images	Low	anyone can view without Flickr account
YouTube	can be low, medium or high	good quality, edited video. Any audio track must be captioned. Highest viewership: 2	Medium	anyone can view, but use is impractical on slow internet connections
		minutes or less		
Blogs	medium (once per week at minimum)	several paragraphs (more content and editing involved)	Medium	anyone can view

## What are some other types of new media?

- Your refuge web site is an essential communication tool, and the Refuge System's content management system (CMS) makes it easier to keep it up to date and inviting

- QR (quick response) codes are printed bar codes that smart phone users can scan to display text or open a web page. They can be used creatively – to play a bird song, for example, or stream a video.

- Apps (applications) are specialized pieces of software, often used on mobile devices, which can enhance a visitor's experience. Examples include iBird, a digital bird guide with sound and pictures, or myRefuge, an app developed in cooperation with the Refuge System that displays maps, photos, and information for more than 300 refuges. MyRefuge is currently available for iPhone or iPad only. In its first year after launch, users downloaded it more than 15,000 times.

- Widgets are small pieces of code added that can make something interesting appear on your web page – clocks, hit counters, music players or features on special topics. One example is "Endangered Species Act De-MYTH-ified," a widget created by Region 7.

Should my refuge use social media?

Any refuge can use social media, but plan carefully before deciding whether it's right for your refuge. Also remember that there are members of the public who are not using social media, or do not have high-speed internet access, and the Service does not want to neglect them; you need a balanced communication strategy. When considering social media, think about:

Time: Social media is fast-moving, with many users posting once a day or more. If you want people to stick with you, your social media presence needs to be active and current. Plan to post at least two to three times per week, and to invest time in developing quality content. If this is more than you can manage, consider feeding content to a regional page or account.

Staffing: Social media staffers must write in a style that balances informality with professionalism. They must be committed to accuracy and comfortable with public
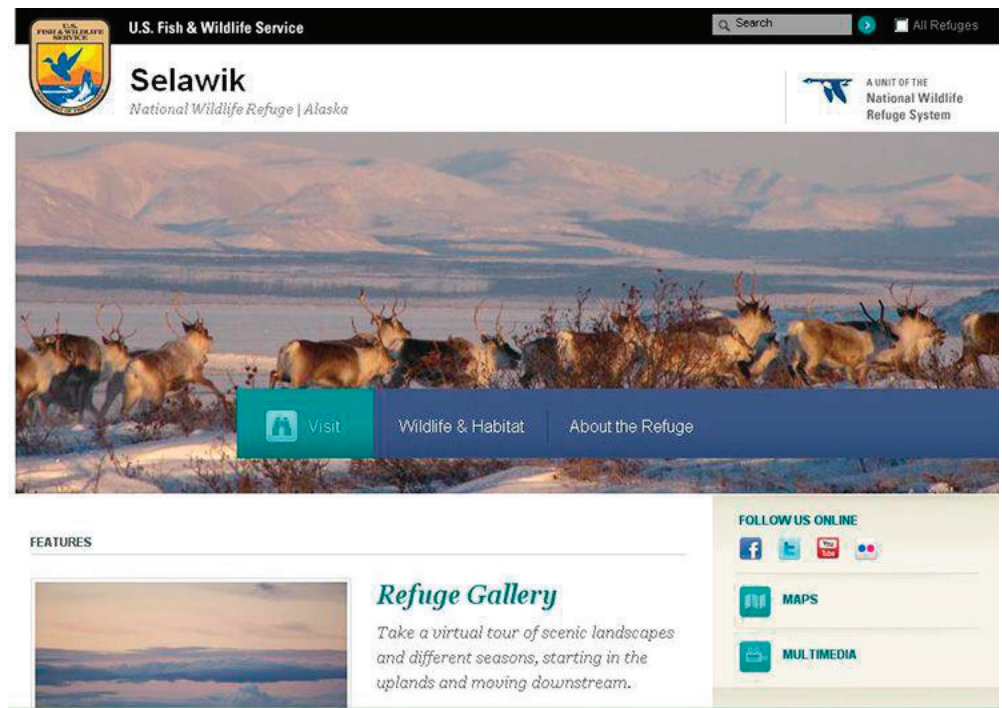
criticism. They must understand what makes your refuge and audience special. Creativity and a good eye for choosing photographs also come in handy. One way to create a well-rounded social media team is to team an intern or volunteer with an experienced staffer.

Potential fan base:
Who are you trying to reach? You may get users from all over the world, but it is important to focus on your main audience. What kind of content will meet their interests and concerns?

Goals: What do you want to accomplish? Do you want to promote events, educate the public about a specific issue, or

make your refuge more visible in the community? Deciding what you want to achieve will help you focus your content.

Getting started

1. Get a feel for new media by feeding some content to your region's new media point of contact. You'll get a sense of the process while spreading the word about your refuge to a wider audience. Browse other USFWS social media sites.

2. Familiarize yourself with the Service's new media policy and best practices (see links below). Talk to colleagues at other refuges about

their experiences and the lessons they've learned.

3. Think strategically. A written plan (formal or informal) will help you get started. Make sure your plans are realistic, and track your progress. Questions to answer: What are your goals? How will you define success? How many staffers and how much time can you dedicate to new media? How frequently will you post? How will you cover for a social media staffer who is away? Do you have (or can you find) terrific Service photos to illustrate your posts? If not, will any of the photographers who visit your refuge give you permission to use some of their photos? (All federal government photos are in the public domain and anyone may use them, but use of an individual's or business' photograph without permission may violate copyright law.) How will you handle controversial topics and critical comments? Can you maintain an active social media presence in future years?

4. Before launching your new media account, put together a collection of "ever green" posts and/or tweets – items that can run any time, such as tidbits about your refuge's animals, plants, special places or history – and photos to illustrate them. This stockpiled content will make your social media launch less stressful. It's a good idea to keep some "ever green" content handy for those stretched-too-thin days.

5. Important: You must go through your social media point of contact to set up your refuge's social media accounts, so you will be protected under the "terms of service agreements," DOI's formal contracts with social media providers. These ensure that the Service retains ownership of content posted through our accounts. Your social media contact person will also help you avoid pitfalls such as duplicate or misnamed accounts, which can be hard to correct.

6. The Service's comment policy should be posted on all social media pages.

7. Follow the Service's graphic standards, which spell out the proper use of the Service and Refuge System logos, approved typefaces and badges.

8. Make sure you have a way to keep track where your content comes from. This ensures that you are complying with copyright laws, posting only content that is the property of the federal government (i.e. was created by a federal employee in the course of their work), or was provided to you with the photographer's or writer's permission for use on new media.

9. Learn how your site's analytical tools can help you track your progress. Facebook has some built-in analytical tools available to those who are administrators of a site. Information on "reach", "engaged users" and "talking about this" are available in in the "insights" box on your Facebook page. Each term's definition is also available. Facebook sends weekly analytical reports. The Service has purchased use of a social media tool called Sprout Social to track patterns and successes in reaching and engaging the public for the national and regional Facebook sites.

Suggestions on content

Short is sweet in the social media world. Twitter's 140-character limit forces users to be brief. Facebook posts of one to two sentences are ideal. Studies show you have five seconds, on average, to grab a viewer's attention, so try for a catchy opening. Some techniques that work:

- Wordplay and puns — "Bear with us" with a photo of a bear

- Questions that ask the viewer about experiences or opinions — "Have you ever seen an eagle egg hatch?"

- Short phrases that telegraph a post's emotional impact — "Good news for endangered songbirds!"

- Phrases spelling out what audience would care most about the information — "Hey Alaskans! If you're planning to hunt sheep… here's something you need to know."

- Mini-stories about individuals — whether people or animals. Avoid: "The National Wildlife Refuge System's first game warden was Paul Kroegel, who began working at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge in 1903." Try this instead: "Who would work full time for $1 a month? That's what Paul Kroegel did. "

Write informally
Aim for a tone that's warm, but professional. A classic rule of thumb is to write as if you were telling your mother about something that happened to you. (That's assuming your mother is not a PhD. conservation biologist.)

Check facts before posting. If you make a mistake and catch it quickly, delete the post and re-write it. If your viewers catch the mistake before you do, post a comment owning up to the error with a minimum of fuss, and giving the correct the information.

Don't post press releases or report on official meetings, rules, etc. With very few exceptions, the public cares about nature and wildlife, not the federal bureaucracy. The Service has a special Facebook page, USFWS News, where press releases of more-than-local interest are posted. If you must write about official activities, use plain language and focus on what these events or activities will mean to people, wildlife or landscapes. If you use Facebook or Twitter to distribute a press release, summarize one main point and post a link to the full document.

Connect viewers to the natural, historical or cultural assets that make your refuge special. For example:

- Alaska's Selawik National Wildlife Refuge is on land that has been home to Native Alaskan Iñupiat people for thousands of years. Education Specialist Brittany Sweeney posts about Iñupiaq tools, special foods, words for different kinds of snow – teaching Facebook fans in the Lower 48 about this culture in an engaging, respectful way. These posts build understanding about life in rural Alaska, and demonstrate why the refuge is a special place worth protecting. Local people also enjoy seeing their world reflected in a positive light.

- At Edwin B. Fosythe National Wildlife Refuge in NJ, Visitor Services Specialist Tiffany Kersten posts engaging photos of refuge animals with a few facts about the animal's life history. It doesn't have to be charismatic megafauna; Kersten posted about snails. "I know nothing about snails, but I Googled snails and learned some interesting tidbits and posted that," she said. "I

got very positive feedback. People say they learn one new thing about nature almost every day from our page.

Use your imagination
A photograph in a magazine inspired Aaron Mize at Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, NM, to create a series of posts that featured scenic photographs of refuges all across the country, each with an arrow and the words "This person loves refuges" superimposed on top. Viewers were simply asked to share the posts. "It went viral because no one had seen it before and it was a cool concept," he said.

Know your audience
Mize says Bosque's Facebook fans are "99 percent non-consumptive users." Many are strongly anti-hunting, so "I keep my posts about hunting factual and don't post pictures of dead animals. … As a hunter with dead animals all over my office and house, this goes against my nature … but we must be strategic and smart about engaging our stakeholders."

Watch your timing
Use Facebook's Insights function to track the days and times when your page gets the most viewers; try to post during those times. Don't deluge your audience: if you have a lot of events to post, space them over several days. If you have a regular feature (like a caption call, photo mash-up or a refuge notebook), try to post it on the same day every week; this will keep viewers coming back to your page regularly.

Post and Tweet with all deliberate speed when events are happening that affect your audience. Here are two examples of refuges that used social media wisely in a crunch:

- When the State of Alaska announced a change in hunting regulations just as hunting season was about to start, Interpretive Specialist Cathy Curby at Arctic Refuge didn't have many ways to get the word out to the rural communities whose residents hunt on the refuge. "I was nervous about putting the information on Facebook because a majority of our Facebook followers are from outside Alaska and like cute and cuddly animal photos," Curby wrote. She opened the post with a targeted appeal to Alaskans who hunt on the refuge. She kept it short and specific, and included a map. "To our surprise we

received a number of 'likes,' didn't receive any negative comments, and had three shares."

- When the Honey Prairie fire burned across Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from April 2011 to April 2012, roads, waterways, the visitors center and the entire refuge were closed at various times. With help from two interns, refuge ranger Sarah Olscamp worked alongside the fire incident commanders and public affairs staff, posting information on Facebook and Twitter as soon as it was approved for release. The team posted photos, videos and human interest stories of firefighters at work. Some of the content was picked up by state and national news media, and the local community came to rely on the refuge's Facebook page for fresh, accurate information. "I realized people were using it to follow their family members who were fighting the fire, to find out what they were doing and know that they were safe," Olscamp said. "We'd get posts on Facebook saying, 'please tell us how we can help you.'"

Here's the most important Facebook suggestion:
"Photos, photos, photos," says Don Freiday, visitor services manager at Forsyth NWR. "A post with a great photo will get six or seven times as many 'likes' as a post with no photo." Managers of the Service's Headquarters page and the Refuge System page almost never put up a Facebook post that does not include a photo. When you find a good photo, it pays to take a few more minutes to find a really great photo.

Tap the National Digital Library, the Service's national and regional Flickr pages, and your refuge's photo archives for the best photos you can find. It is OK to download photos from other Service Facebook pages and use them in your posts, but be careful not to misuse a copyrighted photo. If you are in doubt, contact the original poster and ask about the photo.

Avoid "grip and grin" photos of people shaking hands or giving speeches. You can make an exception for celebrities, but be sparing with photos of government officials who aren't known outside the Service. Most people aren't interested in pictures of people they don't recognize.

Credit the photographer by name whenever possible, especially if the photo has been donated. This will help ensure that photographers are happy to work with you. Photo credits should, at a minimum, name the agency that owns the image:

Photo: USFWS
Photo: Roy W. Lowe/USFWS
Photo: Fred Smith, Friends of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge

Social Media Etiquette
Between regions, programs and field stations, the Service has more than 100 official social media pages and streams. Share their content whenever your audience will find it relevant, interesting or fun. Sharing is the life blood of social media.

When you re-tweet someone else's content on Twitter, 'netiquette' considers it good manners to include the original poster's content as is, with minor changes to save space or fit it to your audience, or with a short comment if space permits. If you re-tweet someone else's content unchanged, put the letters RT followed by an @ sign and the person's Twitter handle at the start of the tweet, like this: RT @USFWSSoutheast. This is the Twittersphere's way to credit the creator of the content. If you change it slightly, use the letters MT for 'modified tweet' at the start of the post.

When sharing or re-tweeting content from another Service social media stream, it is courteous to keep the original URL web address instead of replacing it with your own link. URLs created by bit.ly and other such sites can be tracked using analytic tools built in to the website that created them, or using Sprout Social. By leaving the original poster's URL unchanged, you allow them to see how far their content has spread – valuable information that can help that person use social media more effectively. If you change the URL, you break that information chain.

Friends groups' Twitter streams, Facebook and Flickr pages are not official pages. Service employees should not manage Friends' social media content during working hours. Since the Friends group may hold the copyright to content on their page and may plan to use it on products for sale, get permission before re-purposing their content.

Join the Service's new media managers group on Facebook to stay in contact with others doing similar work. The group shares content, technical tip and ideas. The group is open to anyone working with social media; ask your regional contact or a social media colleague to add you.

New Media Contacts:

Region 1: Scott Eckert

Region 2: Nicole Haskett

Region 3: Courtney Celley

Region 4: Jennifer Strickland

Region 5: Keith Shannon

Region 6: Ryan Moehring

Region 7: Rose Primmer

Region 8: Jon Myatt

HQ: Dorothy Amatucci

Links and Online Resources:
Social Media Guidance and Policy:
- USFWS-approved social media sites, official policies and best practices: https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/newmedia

- Department of the Interior social media policy: http://www.interior.gov/notices/Social-Media-Policy.cfm

- USFWS blog policy: http://www.fws.gov/policy/115fw9.pdf

- Social media comment policy: http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/comment-policy.html

- Service graphic design policy and graphics standards: https://inside.fws.gov/index.cfm/go/post/printing-and-publishing

- GSA guidance on using social media and websites in the federal government: http://www.howto.gov

Service Social Media Sites:
- Service social media hub: http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/

- "Open Spaces," Service's national blog: http://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm?reinit=1

- Links to the Service's HQ and regional Flickr pages: http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/cdm4/flickr.php

Tutorials and how-to info:
- Information, tutorials, webinars and tips on social media for government: http://www.govloop.com/

- Best Practices for using Facebook in government: https://www.box.com/shared/idnp0hs026

- Guide to Facebook Insights (statistics about visits to your page, known in new media jargon as "analytics") http://www.facebook.com/help?page= percent20168695703191089

- Twitter basics: https://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics#topic_114

- 15 commandments for government on Twitter: http://www.govloop.com/page/15-commandments-for-government-agencies-on-twitter

Tools and Resources:
- Digital photo and video library: http://digitalmedia.fws.gov/

- URL shortening: https://bitly.com .

It is easy to set up a bit.ly account, and "hits" to your bit.ly links are easy to track.

- "New Media for Interpretation" has information on digital tools for creating new media products: http://newmediaforinterpretation.weebly.com